



# Confluence

*Where Past Meets Present*

Volume 28 Issue 1

**BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Jan/Feb, 2021

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## 1940s - Winter in Beloit



Covid-19 has presented many challenges for BHS because we are closed. We are adapting programs, exhibits and gatherings to continue our mission of sharing Beloit's history to enhance community pride.



Red arrows indicate Hanchett Hall, the tall building on State Street where Abe Lincoln spoke. Notice the disappearance of Hotel Marvin and other buildings over the years.

By 2021 (below) State Street looks completely different with Blackhawk Bank taking up most of this area.

The evolution of the east side of the 200 block of State Street



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During 1890 the people of Beloit were proud to send their letters in 3 1/2" by 6 1/2" sepia colored envelopes printed specifically for advertising Beloit to all the world.

Oval shaped engravings advertised farm equipment, windmills, woodworking equipment, plows and engines, machine knives, planing mill, taps and tools, shoes, paper, paper machinery, scales, bicycles and gloves. Each one-inch engraving was encased heavily in scroll work.

The businesses (beginning in upper-left and continuing in a circle) were: Gesley Mfg. Co., H. Rosenblatt & Sons, Goodard & Allen Co., N.B. Gaston & sons, Beloit Iron Works, Barrett Mfg. Co., John Foster & Co., C.H. Besley & Co., Cunningham Bros., R.J. Dowd Machine Knife Works, J. Thompson & Sons Mfg. Co., Berlin Machine Works and Fairbanks, Morse & Co.

Above the area reserved for the address was printed **BELOIT, WISCONSIN, USA** in the shape of a scroll. Below this was bracketed the proud statement

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## Would it surprise you to learn that the man who introduced the use of electricity to Beloit was only 16 years old?

Most of us know Arthur Pratt Warner for his invention of the car speedometer and as an inductee into the **Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame**. Few of us really know what a creative and driven person he was. When he was 12, he told his grandfather he wanted to invent things to which he replied *"Arthur, you are too late. Everything to be invented is invented. There is no use wasting your time trying to make something new."*

In 1877 his family lived next door to a black walnut saw mill in Jeffersonville, Ohio. He sold brackets he made from the scraps for 10 or 15 cents a day which was a fortune for a nine-year-old. A farmer across the street bought a steam engine for thrashing. Arthur was there watching from sunrise to sunset, his mechanical curiosity at high pitch. Another farmer bought a wire binder which also received his intense study. The town had a brick kiln. After observing how bricks were made, he went home, made a small kiln and produced bricks to play with.

A circus performed about 10 miles from their town, and it was there that he saw his first electric light. It was an arc light in the center of the tent. He reminisced in his booklet **Making Things**, that *"My interest in electricity began with my first sight of that light, and the interest has always remained with me."*

In 1881 they moved to live on his Grandfather Pratt's farm about 3 miles south of Clinton. His father had obtained work in a pattern shop at the corner of Grand Ave. and Third St. in Beloit. By 1885 his father had become the owner of the shop. Arthur helped his father build their house at 502 Eighth St. after finishing his school day.

Among the things that his father made were skis for Beloit College students. Two college boys were discussing a course they were taking in electricity under a professor Tommy Smith. Arthur wanted to take the course even though he was only 15 at the time.

Professor Smith allowed Arthur to listen to the lectures he was giving. He went to all of the classes while finishing his first year of high school and working in his father's shop. This was the only college education Warner ever received.

His father subscribed to a magazine called "The Electrical Engineer" which had a description of a small electric motor. He wanted to try to make a dynamo and asked Tommy Smith for advice. Arthur worked out the pattern, made the mold and took it to Merrill Iron Works for casting. The dynamo turned out beautifully.



The next problem was getting electricity because there were no power plants in those days. So, of course, he had to construct a battery. That required he gather left-over pieces of steel Eclipse Wind Engine Co. was discarding from making railroad water tanks. He ground up carbon from the gas company, mixed it with coal tar which he used

to make molds. He found old worn-out washboards, melted the zinc on them and cast zinc plates. Behold, a crude battery. All this work turned into a motor to power his mother's sewing machine.

The success of this project led to the desire to make a larger dynamo with sufficient capacity to light an incandescent lamp. When the machine was finished it attracted a good deal of attention, and the Gaston Scale Co. bought it to run 25 lights. Before discarding it after several years of use, they were running 75 lights. The sale to Gaston's gave him money to build a larger generator which he sold to Cunningham Bros.

(next page)

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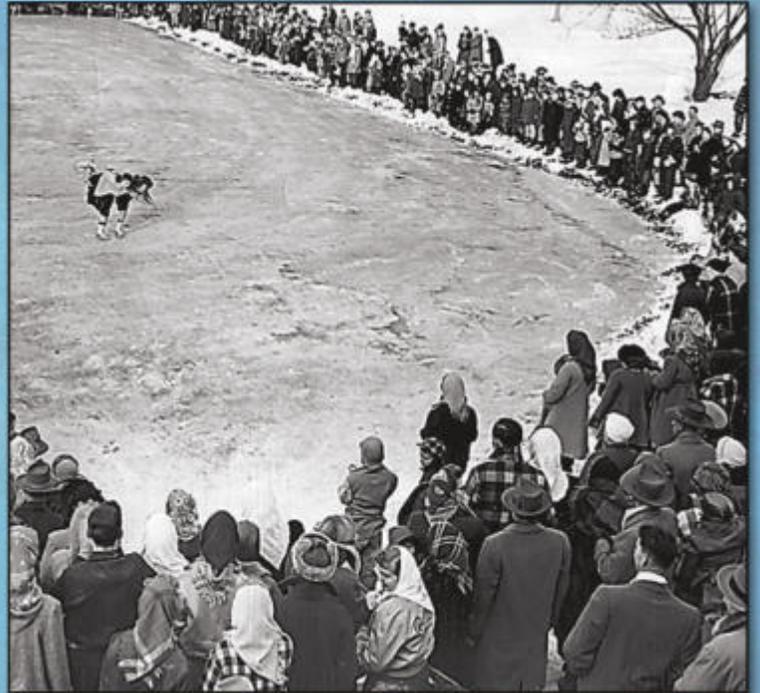
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The 1940s and 50s in Beloit was a time when ice skating was a big part of recreation for both kids and adults. Ice rinks were created at both Lincoln and Roosevelt Jr. High Schools by flooding an area near the school. Warming houses were provided for thawing out fingers and toes. Many Beloiters have fond memories of fun times spent skating at those rinks.



The **Beloit Skating Club** was founded in 1944 to showcase the bountiful local talent. The club presented 14 years of dazzling annual shows and competitions. On a cold day, February 10, 1945, they gave their first performance to a crowd of over 2,000 people gathered around the Riverside Lagoon. Adeline Delaney directed most of the shows which typically consisted of a clown and acrobatic acts as well as dance numbers and ballet. Some of the acts were "Twins on Ice", "Twirling Miss" and "Two Alike". They glided, danced, jumped and twirled. The Beloit Daily News provided medals and ribbons presented by City Manager Archie Telfer.

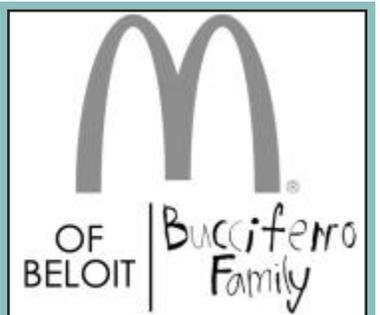
*Arthur Pratt Warner article continued...*

Alonzo Aldrich, the President of the Beloit Iron Works, saw the dynamo at Gaston's and became interested in a machine for his shops. He furnished the money to help Arthur build it and wire the plant. Warner writes *"I shall never forget this kindness. I still believe, as I did then, that he was one of the best men that ever lived in Beloit."* The dynamo was to run 75 lights but actually ran 150 incandescent and 3 or 4 arc lights. When that was done, **he was 18**. The next winter a dynamo to run 200 lights was installed at Beloit Straw Board (at present Beloit Box Board location).

At the age of 21, Arthur became acquainted with Wilbur Wiley who was also interested in electricity and had some money. They decided to start Wiley-Warner Electric Company for furnishing light and power in Beloit. The plant was located at Roosevelt Ave. and Third St. and later moved to Second St. on the race to use water power. They satisfied their customers but weren't making any money. Both looked for work elsewhere. Warner moved to Madison to work for Northern Electric. Fortunately, he returned to Beloit, a place he always thought of as home, with his wife and children in 1904. Warner Instrument Company was his next great accomplishment. He died at the age of 86 holding over 100 patents. Guess his grandfather was wrong!

*This truly remarkable man, Arthur Pratt Warner, was certainly a blessing for Beloit*

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## A Notable Beloitier



We know that Beloit has contributed its share of inventors and leaders of various kinds in the past. Today we are featuring a man from Beloit's "modern history". On a list of "86 Notable People from Beloit" is the name of **Mark Simonson**.

Born in Beloit in 1955, he attended Turner Schools where he thought about letters and drawing letters for as long as he can remember. His elementary school papers were covered in doodles of letters which, for him, had distinct personalities; the letter "e" looked like it was smiling, the letter "a" looked alert. This feeling for letters made him very aware of different typefaces. While most children read their books for content, Mark examined the various fonts they used and how they made him feel.

One of his uncles went to art school and became a graphic designer. Another uncle painted wildlife, did sign-painting and cartooning and worked as a printer. Art seemed to run in his family, so naturally, Mark's goal was to become an artist. Some of his earlier creative works were covers for Turner High School yearbooks.



As a child, Mark would spend time with his engineer dad in the basement where he learned about various tools and how to fix things. Bingo. It takes both artistic skills and technical skills to make a font.

Mark's work career started as a graphic designer in Minnesota. It wasn't until he was in his 40s that he started making fonts. He was able to make the shift to font design when his partner Pat won money on the game show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. Her success allowed him to take six months off from graphic design work to develop several new fonts that he could sell.

His most popular commercial font is **Proxima Nova** which is used by **BuzzFeed, NBC News, CBS, New York Times** and many others. Over **25,000 websites** have chosen it to represent themselves. Each of us has seen this font many times without knowing its connection to Beloit.

Proxima Nova

Proxima Nova Soft

It is popular because: 1) it works well on screens, 2) it has great flexibility (becomes "invisible" so products take priority) and 3) it's trendy.

The first public use for the font came in 1993 when he was asked to do the designing for the original radio drama of **Star Wars**. It became a licensed font in 2005.

Mark opened his own studio in St. Paul, Minnesota in 2000. He has over 100 fonts on the market. His favorite is **Coquette** which just seemed to fall out of his head fully formed. He likes it because it makes him happy to see people use it.

Coquette

*We are proud of this creative Beloitier who has helped make reading more enjoyable for us.*

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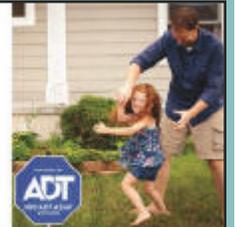
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**Deaths in Beloit 1869**

Life was hard for our early settlers, and many did not live very long lives.

Ages 0-10	40% died
11-20	6%
21-30	28%
31-40	1%
41-50	8%
51-60	8%
61-70	5%
71-80	3%
81-90	1%

**74% died by age 30      9% lived to be over 60**

Causes of death in descending order were: tuberculosis, typhoid, cholera, stroke, pneumonia and child birth.

**Deaths in Beloit 1911 (40 years later)**

Ages 0-10	26% died
11-20	6%
21-30	6%
31-40	10%
41-50	10%
51-60	9%
61-70	15%
71-80	15%
81-90	3%

**38% died by age 30      33% lived to be over 60**

**Deaths in Beloit 1971 (60 years later)**

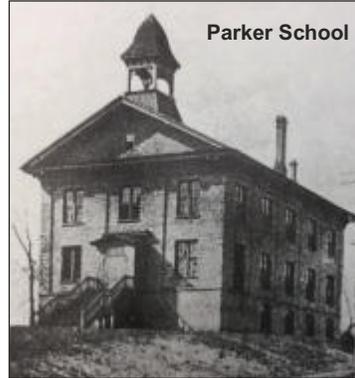
**4.5% died by age 30      77.3% lived to be over 60**

These positive changes happened because of better medical/dental care, immunizations, personal and family hygiene. Refrigeration was introduced. Meats were wrapped and sold under sanitary conditions and no raw milk in open cans was allowed. Outhouses and cisterns were abolished. Streets were paved and stables with pigs, horses and fowl in backyards were abolished. Contaminated wells, sewage and garbage disposal were controlled.

**Much as we Americans don't like restrictions, many are certainly for our own good.**

**Cement Comes to Beloit**

Cement first came to the United States from Europe in 1868 as ballast in tramp steamers. In 1885 Americans began producing cement for themselves but it wasn't until 1900 that Beloit began using it.



Parker School

*In 1900 the first cement was used to build a farm-home on the Morgan Farm on Milwaukee road. The buildings were poured solidly using only cement and sand.*

*The first time cement was used to lay up bricks was when Parker School was built in 1901. This was the first public building to use cement for this*

*purpose. In 1902 cement was used for the first time in laying up foundations with limestone.*

*In 1903 cement made possible the first all-concrete industrial building west of Chicago erected for the C.H. Besley Co. on Third St.*

*By 1912 the last remaining plank sidewalks in the downtown area were replaced with cement and concrete sidewalks ordered by the council.*

*In 1915 the first solid cement nine-foot strip of concrete was laid from the Morgan Farm to Beloit. The Morgan Farm later became The Manor Restaurant.*



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A collection of items from the Joan Wooten Estate was recently donated to BHS. The donor inherited the estate and wanted the items to be shared with the Beloit community. The artifacts in the Wooten collection are from the early 1900's through 1973. **Gladys (Watts) Wooten** (Joan's mother) and her family were longtime Beloit residents and she had a deep love for this community. We are honored to preserve and share the Watts-Wooten family items and their contributions to the Beloit we all know and love today.

Gladys Watts-Wooten was a Beloit through and through. She attended Beloit College where she met her husband James E. Wooten and graduated in 1923. It was believed that Gladys returned to Beloit College as a housemother for the Kappa Delta Sorority Upsilon Chapter. Some of the items donated were things she collected during this time in her life. These items include a book of Kappa Delta songs, Kappa Delta holiday stamps, a Kappa Delta jewelry box, a history of the Kappa Delta Sorority 1897-1972, and many other KD documents and items. Gladys was also very involved in the Beloit Student's Center which opened in 1944 and ran for many years. Part of the group of items from the student's center are a neon sign, an electric wall clock that hung inside the center and the original charter from the organization.



Many of you will recognize the name of Gladys' daughter **Joan Wooten** who passed away Feb. 8, 2020. She was a cellist and very active in various musical groups. She was instrumental in preserving the history of one-room schoolhouses by conducting a series of interviews with former students and teachers and archiving them in book form.

She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution for over 40 years and received recognition for her years of service with the group. She was particularly devoted to the preservation of the **historic cobblestone Rasey House**, which serves as the chapter house for the Beloit DAR.

IN LOVING  
memory



**DOROTHEA "VONNIE"  
ADAMS**

We were sad to learn of the passing of one of our long-term sustaining members Vonnie Adams on December 2, 2020.

As a lifelong Beloit, Vonnie gave many volunteer hours to Beloit Memorial Hospital and the Beloit-Janesville Symphony Orchestra.

We will miss her contagious laughter.



*BHS certainly appreciates her work to help preserve one of Beloit's cobblestone houses!*

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**Message from Donna**



The Beloit Historical Society has weathered the challenges of 2020 and is doing well. Even so, we are looking forward to 2021 being a much better year.

2020 was filled with new experiences and innovation. During the summer three interns worked remotely to create exhibit scripts for the Military and Sports galleries. These exhibits will be ready for viewing when we are able to reopen the building.

The first virtual exhibit debuted recognizing the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. This debut expanded our use of technology and methods of communication.

This past fall, two interns researched Beloit history and processed an archival collection, increasing our shared knowledge. A collaboration with the **Downtown Beloit Association**, with research done by BHS intern Helen Griffin, resulted in a pictorial historical timeline of downtown Beloit. This photographic display graces the walls of their new location at 557 E. Grand Ave. and was unveiled during their Holidazzle event in December. See additional information about the exhibit to the right.

As we move into 2021, we are planning for an exciting year. Visitation to the Lincoln Center continues to be by appointment until the environment is safer to fully open the doors. In the meantime, we remain available by phone, email and US mail. We are keeping busy planning for the future and getting the building ready for reopening. An interpretation plan, in conjunction with the new strategic plan will begin implementation by next summer. Details will be provided in the next issue of the *Confluence* and on the BHS website.

Stay safe, healthy and in good spirits!



**NEW EXHIBIT DOWNTOWN**

Our mission statement *Sharing Beloit's History to Enhance Community Pride* just took a step forward with a new exhibit **currently being installed** at the Downtown Beloit Association office, 557 E. Grand Ave.

The display will include a written introduction with BHS' logo as providing the content of the exhibit along with a short MP4 video of downtown Beloit images that DBA will loop on their TV. Most of the work on the project was done by fall Beloit College Duffy Intern Helen Griffin. She researched, chose appropriate images and scanned them for a timeline of pictures showing changes and significant events that occurred in downtown Beloit. She also wrote the text that will appear beneath each image identifying the date along with other information about the picture.

**GOOD NEWS FOR BHS**

BHS is the recipient of a \$5,000 grant from the **Allen Foundation Trust** for general operating support. The grant supplements the budget to help cover costs and payroll enabling staff to continue serving the Beloit Community.

**THANK YOU!**

Many thanks to member **Joel Steinke** who voluntarily removed scrub tree overgrowth along our building. He hauled away 3 pick-up truck loads of limbs and paid for the recycling fees. **We really appreciate Joel's generosity.**



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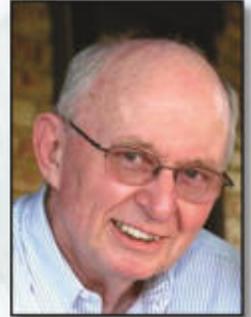
- Cheri Adair
- Judy Buckley
- Rochelle Chaffin
- Delores Dilley
- Marilyn Fassett
- Lynsay Pankhurst
- John Patrick
- Debbie Winters

TRIVIA TEASER

Today's question is a 3-parter: Where was the first 1) inclined elevator 2) horizontal elevator and 3) vertical elevator installed in Beloit?

**Answer:** (1) The first **inclined** elevator was used in 1893 by the Knickerbocher Ice Co. to move ice from the river into storage houses (followed 7 years later by City Ice Co.)  
 (2) The first **horizontal** elevator made its appearance at Studevant & Wright Creamery in 1908.  
 (3) The first **vertical** elevator was put into Beloit Iron Works foundry in 1900.  
 This vertical elevator was followed by:  
 1904 Hilton Hotel  
 1905 Goodwin Block  
 1907 Beloit High School  
 1910 E.L. Chester Co. and C.H. Besley Co.  
 1919 Foster (Freeman) Shoe  
 1922 Fairbanks - Morse  
 1925 McNeany's Dept. Store  
 1927 Kaplan Block  
 1928 Strong Building & Beloit Memorial Hosp.  
 1931 Beloit Iron Works Pattern Stores

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT  
Noble Rose



Noble Rose passed away in Green Valley, Arizona, on November 12, 2020. He was a long-time supporter of Beloit and the Beloit Historical Society. We were very saddened to hear of his death. He was a 1947 graduate of Beloit High School and played a significant role in the development of Beloit and surrounding communities as an architect for over 45 years, specializing in libraries, industrial and government buildings.

From offices located in Beloit from 1955 to 1987, his major projects included Beloit Catholic High School, fire stations, Elbert H. Neese YMCA, Beloit Public Library, Beloit City Hall, McNeal and Aldrich Junior High, as well as elementary schools, and several banks and commercial projects.

In 1987, Rose established Architecture Network Incorporated (ANI) in Madison, beginning a semi-retirement in 1997. During this time period in his career, Rose focused on public libraries and **renovated Lincoln Junior High School for use by the Beloit Historical Society. Now known as the Lincoln Center, the building continues to serve as the society's offices and gallery space.**

Noble Rose was very active in many community organizations which also contributed to the development of Beloit. He served as president of the Beloit Rotary Club, and on the boards of the YMCA, Beloit Janesville Symphony Orchestra, Art League, Beloit Housing Authority and the Chamber of Commerce.

**Beloit was very fortunate to have such a talented and philanthropic citizen in our community for so many years.**

**Donations made in memory of Noble Rose are being used to catalog the documents of some of these organizations that are part of the Beloit Historical Society's archival collections.**

Those who have donated thus far are:

- Richard Dexter
- Vonnie Adams
- Annie Collins
- Carol Elliot

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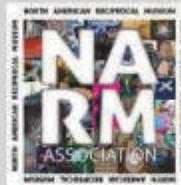
1. Six issues of *Confluence*, the BHS newsletter
2. Free access to the Luebke Memorial Library
3. Free admission to the Hanchett-Bartlett Homestead
4. Discounts on BHS programs and services
5. Affiliate Membership in the Wisconsin State Historical Society
6. Voting privileges at the Annual Meeting
7. Opportunities to get involved as a volunteer or board member



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Sustaining members get all the same benefits as a typical BHS membership, but they also receive a North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association membership. Their NARM card provides access for free or with membership rights to over 1,000 other museums.

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# Confluence Newsletter

*Sharing Beloit's History to  
Enhance Community Pride*



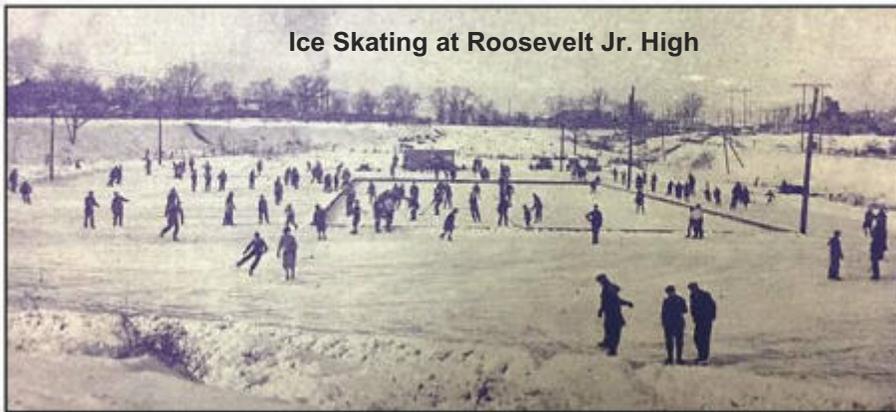
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**BHS Staff**

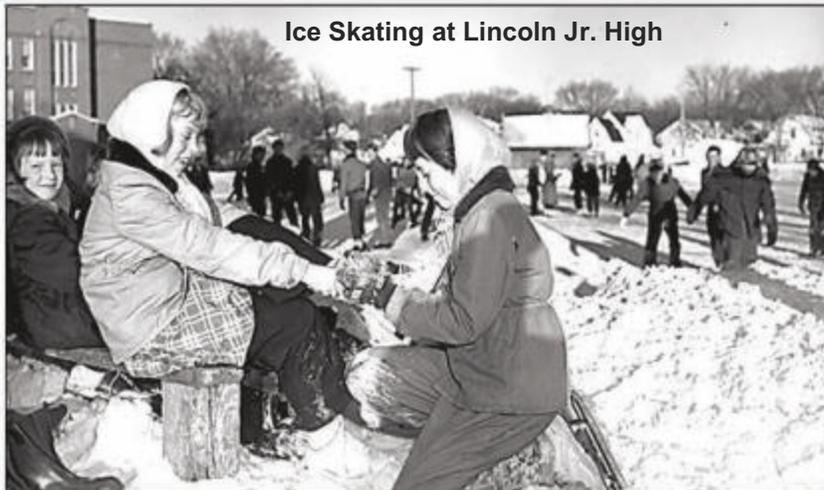
**Donna Langford**, Exec. Director  
**Julia Schoenthal**, Prog. Coord.  
**Leith Rohr**, Archivist

**Board of Directors**

**Rick Dexter**, President  
**Nicolette Meister**, Vice President  
**Dick Gerhard**, Treasurer  
**Ellen Joyce**, Secretary  
**Diana Brooks**  
**Tom Larsen**  
**Jackie Jackson**



Ice Skating at Roosevelt Jr. High



Ice Skating at Lincoln Jr. High

More ice skating pictures on page 5

## Beloit Historical Society Sustaining Memberships

*Many Thanks to You!*

- Joe and Ingrid Chamberlain
- Rick Dexter
- Teri and Don Downing
- Dick Gerhard
- Jim and Joyce Haight
- Tom and Peggy Lang \***
- Nicolette Meister/Kevin Larson
- Tim and Deborah McKearn
- Sam and Judy Paddock
- Charles Ricksecker
- Michael Schnur
- Jennifer Scott
- Gary and Lois Swanson
- Cole Swartz
- John and Bonnie Wetter
- Henry Wieland \***
- Harry Wong M.D.
- John and Becky Wong

*\* Designates new sustaining member*